EVIDENCE

COLLEGE
T-3

FOR THE RESURRECTION

For centuries many of the world's distinguished philosophers have assaulted Christianity as being irrational, superstitious, and absurd. Many have chosen simply to ignore the central issue of the resurrection. Others have tried to explain it away through various theories. But the historical evidence just can't be discounted.

A student at the University of Uruguay said to me, "Professor McDowell, why can't you refute Christianity?"

"For a very simple reason," I answered. "I am not able to explain away an event in history—the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

How can we explain the empty tomb? Can it possibly be accounted for by any natural cause?

A QUESTION OF HISTORY

After more than 700 hours of studying this subject, I have come to the conclusion that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is either one of the most wicked, vicious, heartless hoaxes ever foisted on the minds of human beings—or it is the most remarkable fact of history.

Here are some of the facts relevant to the resurrection: Jesus of Nazareth, a Jewish prophet who claimed to be the Christ prophesied in the Jewish Scriptures, was arrested, was judged a political criminal, and was crucified. Three days after His death and burial, some women who went to His tomb found the body gone. In subsequent weeks, His disciples claimed that God had raised Him from the dead and that He appeared to them various times before ascending into heaven.

From that foundation, Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire and has continued to exert great influence down through the centuries.

LIVING WITNESSES

The New Testament accounts of the resurrection were being circulated within the lifetimes of men and women alive at the time of the resurrection. Those people could certainly have confirmed or denied the accuracy of such accounts.

The writers of the four Gospels either had themselves been witnesses or else were relating the accounts of eyewitnesses of the actual events. In advocating their case for the gospel, a word that means "good news," the apostles appealed (even when confronting their most severe opponents) to common knowledge concerning the facts of the resurrection.

F. F. Bruce, Rylands professor of biblical criticism and exegesis at the University of Manchester, says concerning the value of the New Testament records as primary sources: "Had there been any tendency to depart from the facts in any material respect, the possible presence of hostile witnesses in the audience would have served as a further corrective."

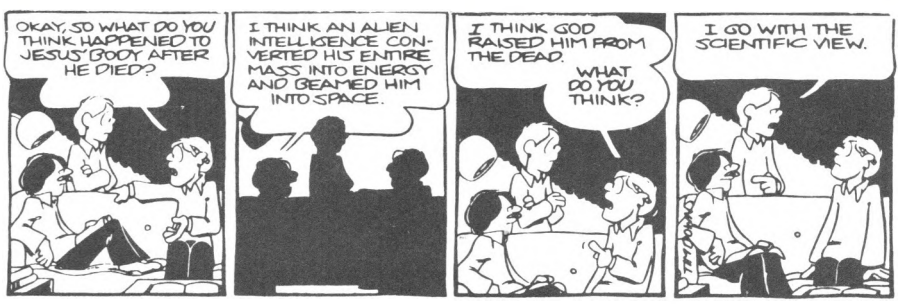
IS THE NEW TESTAMENT RELIABLE?

Because the New Testament provides the primary historical source for information on the resurrection, many critics during the 19th century attacked the reliability of these biblical documents.

By the end of the 19th century, however, archaeological discoveries had confirmed the accuracy of the New Testament manuscripts. Discoveries of early papyri bridged the gap between the time of Christ and existing manuscripts from a later date.

Those findings increased scholarly confidence in the reliability of the Bible. William F. Albright, who in his day was the world's foremost biblical archaeologist, said: "We can already say emphatically that there is no longer any solid basis for dating any book of the New Testament after about A.D. 80, two full generations before the date between 130 and 150 given by the more radical New Testament critics of today."

Coinciding with the papyri discoveries, an abundance of other manuscripts came to light


OKAY, SO WHAT DO YOU THINK HAPPENED TO JESUS' BODY AFTER HE DIED?
I THINK AN ALIEN INTELLIGENCE CONVERTED HIS ENTIRE MASS INTO ENERGY AND BEAMED HIM INTO SPACE.
I THINK GOD RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD.
WHAT DO YOU THINK?
I GO WITH THE SCIENTIFIC VIEW.

(over 24,000 copies of early New Testament manuscripts are known to be in existence today). The historian Luke wrote of "authentic evidence" concerning the resurrection. Sir William Ramsay, who spent 15 years attempting to undermine Luke's credentials as a historian, and to refute the reliability of the New Testament, finally concluded: "Luke is a historian of the first rank . . . This author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians."

I claim to be an historian. My approach to Classics is historical. And I tell you that the evidence for the life, the death, and the resurrection of Christ is better authenticated than most of the facts of ancient history . . .

E. M. Blaiklock
Professor of Classics
Auckland University

BACKGROUND

The New Testament witnesses were fully aware of the background against which the resurrection took place. The body of Jesus, in accordance with Jewish burial custom, was wrapped in a linen cloth. About 100 pounds of aromatic spices, mixed together to form a gummy substance, were applied to the wrappings of cloth about the body.

After the body was placed in a solid rock tomb, an extremely large stone was rolled against the entrance of the tomb. Large stones weighing approximately two tons were normally rolled (by means of levers) against a tomb entrance.

A Roman guard of strictly disciplined fighting men was stationed to guard the tomb. This guard affixed on the tomb the Roman seal, which was meant to prevent any attempt at vandalizing the sepulcher. Anyone trying to move the stone from the tomb's entrance would have broken the seal and thus incurred the wrath of Roman law.

But three days later the tomb was empty. The followers of Jesus said He had risen from the dead. They reported that He appeared to them during a period of 40 days, showing Himself to them by many "infallible proofs." Paul the apostle recounted that Jesus appeared to more than 500 of His followers at one time, the majority of whom were still alive and who could confirm what Paul wrote.

So many security precautions were taken with the trial, crucifixion, burial, entombment, sealing, and guarding of Christ's tomb that it becomes very difficult for critics to defend their position that Christ did not rise from the dead. Consider these facts:

FACT #1: BROKEN ROMAN SEAL

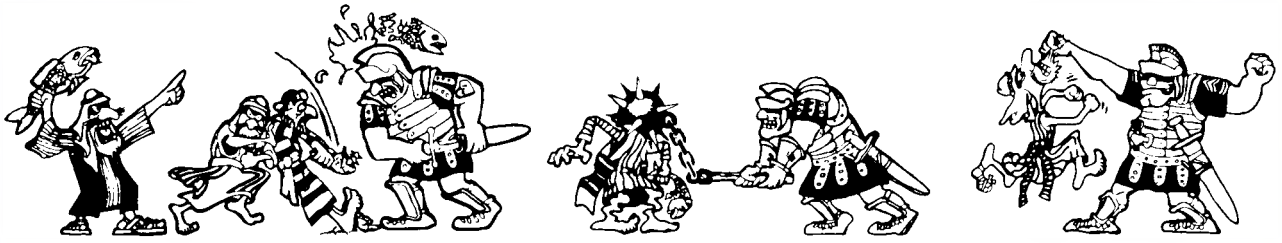
As we have said, the first obvious fact was the breaking of the seal that stood for the power and authority of the Roman Empire. The consequences of breaking the seal were extremely severe. The FBI and CIA of the Roman Empire were called into action to find the man or men who were responsible. If they were apprehended, it meant automatic execution by crucifixion upside down. People feared the breaking of the seal. Jesus' disciples displayed signs of cowardice when they hid themselves. Peter, one of these disciples, went out and denied Christ three times.

FACT #2: EMPTY TOMB

As we have already discussed, another obvious fact after the resurrection was the empty tomb. The disciples of Christ did not go off to Athens or Rome to preach that Christ was raised from the dead. Rather, they went right back to the city of Jerusalem, where, if what they were teaching was false, the falsity would be evident. The empty tomb was "too notorious to be denied." Paul Althaus states that the resurrection "could have not been maintained in Jerusalem for a single day, for a single hour, if the emptiness of the tomb had not been established as a fact for all concerned."

Both Jewish and Roman sources and traditions admit an empty tomb. Those resources range from Josephus to a compilation of fifth-century Jewish writings called the "Toledoth Jeshu." Dr. Paul Maier calls this "positive evidence from a hostile source, which is the strongest kind of historical evidence. In essence, this means that if a source admits a fact decidedly not in its favor, then that fact is genuine."

Gamaliel, who was a member of the Jewish high court, the Sanhedrin, put forth the suggestion that the rise of the Christian movement was God's doing; he could not have done that if the tomb were still occupied, or if



MAYBE HIS 11 FOLLOWERS OVERPOWERED THE ROMANS AND TOOK THE BODY.

the Sanhedrin knew the whereabouts of Christ's body.

Paul Maier observes that ". . . if all the evidence is weighed carefully and fairly, it is indeed justifiable, according to the canons of historical research, to conclude that the sepulcher of Joseph of Arimathea, in which Jesus was buried, was actually empty on the morning of the first Easter. And no shred of evidence has yet been discovered in literary sources, epigraphy, or archaeology that would disprove this statement."

FACT #3: LARGE STONE MOVED

On that Sunday morning the first thing that impressed the people who approached the tomb was the unusual position of the one and a half to two-ton stone that had been lodged in front of the doorway. All the Gospel writers mention it.

There exists no document from the ancient world, witnessed by so excellent a set of textual and historical testimonies . . . Scepticism regarding the historical credentials of Christianity is based upon an irrational bias.

Clark Pinnock
McMaster University

Those who observed the stone after the resurrection describe its position as having been rolled up a slope away not just from the entrance of the tomb, but from the entire massive sepulcher. It was in such a position that it looked as if it had been picked up and carried away. Now, I ask you, if the disciples had wanted to come in, tiptoe around the sleeping guards, and then roll the stone over and steal Jesus' body, how could they have done that without the guards' awareness?

MAYBE THE GUARDS FELL ASLEEP (EVEN THOUGH IT WOULD COST THEM THEIR LIVES). THEN HIS FOLLOWERS REMOVED THE TWO-TON STONE AND STOLE HIS BODY WITHOUT WAKING UP THE GUARDS.

FACT #4: ROMAN GUARD GOES AWOL

The Roman guards fled. They left their place of responsibility. How can their attrition be explained, when Roman military discipline was so exceptional?

Justin, in Digest #49, mentions all the offenses that required the death penalty. The fear of their superiors' wrath and the possibility of death meant that they paid close attention to the most minute details of their jobs. One way a guard was put to death was by being stripped of his clothes and then burned alive in a fire started with his garments. If it was not apparent which soldier had failed in his duty, then lots were drawn to see which one would be punished with death for the guard unit's failure. Certainly the entire unit would not have fallen asleep with that kind of threat over their heads. Dr. George Currie, a student of Roman military discipline, wrote that fear of punishment "produced flawless attention to duty, especially in the night watches."

FACT #5: GRAVECLOTHES TELL A TALE

In a literal sense, against all statements to the contrary, the tomb was not totally empty—because of an amazing phenomenon. John, a disciple of Jesus, looked over to the place where the body of Jesus had lain, and there were the grave clothes, in the form of the body, slightly caved in and empty—like the empty chrysalis of a caterpillar's cocoon. That's enough to make a believer out of anybody. John never did get over it.

The first thing that stuck in the minds of the disciples was not the empty tomb, but rather the empty grave clothes—undisturbed in form and position.

FACT #6: JESUS' APPEARANCES CONFIRMED

Christ appeared alive on several occasions after the cataclysmic events of that first Easter.

When studying an event in history, it is important to know whether enough people who were participants or eyewitnesses to the event were alive when the facts about the event were published. To know this is obviously helpful in ascertaining the accuracy of the published report. If the number of eyewitnesses is substantial, the event can be regarded as fairly well established. For instance, if we all witness a murder, and a later police report turns out to be a fabrication of lies, we as eyewitnesses can refute it.

OVER 500 WITNESSES

Several very important factors are often overlooked when considering Christ's post-resurrection appearances to individuals. The first is the large number of

witnesses of Christ after that resurrection morning.

One of the earliest records of Christ's appearing after the resurrection is by Paul. The apostle appealed to his audience's knowledge of the fact that Christ had been seen by more than 500 people at one time. Paul reminded them that the majority of those people were still alive and could be questioned. Dr. Edwin M. Yamauchi, associate professor of history at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, emphasizes: "What gives a special authority to the list (of witnesses) as historical evidence is the reference to most of the five hundred brethren being still alive. St. Paul says in effect, 'If you do not believe me, you can ask them.' Such a statement in an admittedly genuine letter written within thirty years of the event is almost as strong evidence as one could hope to get for something that happened nearly two thousand years ago."

Let's take the more than 500 witnesses who saw Jesus alive after His death and burial, and place them in a courtroom. Do you realize that if each of those 500 people were to testify for only six minutes, including cross-examination, you would have an amazing 50 hours of firsthand testimony? Add to this the testimony of many other eyewitnesses and you would well have the largest and most lopsided trial in history.

HOSTILE WITNESSES

Another factor crucial to interpreting Christ's appearances is that He also appeared to those who were hostile or unconvinced.

Over and over again, I have read or heard people comment that Jesus was seen alive after His death and burial only by His friends and followers. Using that argument, they attempt to water down the overwhelming impact of the multiple eyewitness accounts. But that line of reasoning is so pathetic it hardly deserves comment. No author or informed individual would regard Saul of Tarsus as being a follower of Christ. The facts show the exact opposite. Saul despised Christ and persecuted Christ's followers. It was a life-shattering experience when Christ appeared to him. Although he was at the time not a disciple, he later became the apostle Paul, one of the greatest witnesses for the truth of the resurrection.

If the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt.

F. F. Bruce
Manchester University

The argument that Christ's appearances were only to followers is an argument for the most part from silence, and arguments from silence can be dangerous. It is equally possible that all to whom Jesus appeared became followers. No one acquainted with the facts can accurately say that Jesus appeared to just "an insignificant few."

Christians believe that Jesus was bodily resurrected in time and space by the supernatural power of God. The difficulties of belief may be great, but the problems inherent in unbelief present even greater difficulties.

The theories advanced to explain the resurrection by "natural causes" are weak; they actually help to build confidence in the truth of the resurrection.

THE WRONG TOMB?

A theory propounded by Kirsopp Lake assumes that the women who reported that the body was missing had mistakenly gone to the wrong tomb. If so,

MAYBE JESUS DIDN'T DIE. MAYBE HE JUST PASSED OUT ON THE CROSS, THEN WOKE UP IN THE TOMB, PUSHED OVER THE TWO-TON STONE, OVERPOWERED THE ROMAN SOLDIERS, AND ESCAPED.

JESUS IS RISEN!!
WE HAVE SEEN HIM!
WOW!
HEY, SHUT THOSE GUYS UP!
YEAH, SHUT THEM UP.
JUST SHOW THEM THE BODY.
YES, SHOW THEM THE BODY.
DO YOU HAVE THE BODY?
NO, WE DON'T HAVE THE BODY.
DOES ANYONE HAVE THE BODY ?

then the disciples who went to check up on the women's statement must have also gone to the wrong tomb. We may be certain, however, that Jewish authorities, who asked for a Roman guard to be stationed at the tomb to prevent Jesus' body from being stolen, would not have been mistaken about the location. Nor would the Roman guards, for they were there!

If the resurrection-claim was merely because of a geographical mistake, the Jewish authorities would have lost no time in producing the body from the proper tomb, thus effectively quenching for all time any rumor resurrection.

HALLUCINATIONS?

Another attempted explanation claims that the appearances of Jesus after the resurrection were either illusions or hallucinations. Unsupported by the psychological principles governing the appearances of hallucinations, this theory also does not coincide with the historical situation. Again, where was the actual body, and why wasn't it produced?

DID JESUS SWOON?

Another theory, popularized by Venturini several centuries ago, is often quoted today. This is the swoon theory, which says that Jesus didn't die; he merely fainted from exhaustion and loss of blood. Everyone thought Him dead, but later He resuscitated and the disciples thought it to be a resurrection.

Skeptic David Friedrich Strauss—certainly no believer in the resurrection—gave the deathblow to any thought that Jesus revived from a swoon: "It is impossible that a being who had stolen half-dead out of the sepulchre, who crept about weak and ill, wanting medical treatment, who required bandaging, strengthening and indulgence, and who still at last yielded to His sufferings, could have given to the disciples the impression that He was a Conqueror over death and the grave, the Prince of Life, an impression which lay at the bottom of their future ministry. Such a resuscitation could only have weakened the impression which He had made upon them in life and in death, at the most could only have given it an elegiac voice, but could by no possibility have changed their sorrow into enthusiasm, have elevated their reverence into worship."

For the New Testament of Acts, the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming. Any attempt to reject its basic historicity, even in matters of detail, must now appear absurd. Roman historians have long taken it for granted.

A. N. Sherwin-White
Classical Roman Historian

THE BODY STOLEN?

Then consider the theory that the body was stolen by the disciples while the guards slept. The depression and cowardice of the disciples provide a hardhitting argument against their suddenly becoming so brave and daring as to face a detachment of soldiers at the tomb and steal the body. They were in no mood to attempt anything like that.

The theory that the Jewish or Roman authorities moved Christ's body is no more reasonable an explanation for the empty tomb than theft by the disciples. If the authorities had the body in their possession or knew where it was, why, when the disciples were preaching the resurrection in Jerusalem, didn't they explain: "Wait! We moved the body, see, He didn't rise from the grave"?

And if such a rebuttal failed, why didn't they explain exactly where Jesus' body lay? If this failed, why didn't they recover the corpse, put it on a cart, and wheel it through the center of Jerusalem? Such an action would have destroyed Christianity—not in the cradle, but in the womb!

THE RESURRECTION IS A FACT

Professor Thomas Arnold, for 14 years a headmaster of Rugby, author of the famous, *History of Rome*, and appointed to the chair of modern history at Oxford, was well acquainted with the value of evidence in determining historical facts. This great scholar said: "I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God hath given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead." Brooke Foss Westcott, an English scholar, said: "Taking all the evidence together, it is not too much to say that there is no historic incident better or more variously supported than the resurrection of Christ. Nothing but the antecedent assumption that it must be false could have suggested the idea of deficiency in the proof of it."

REAL PROOF: THE DISCIPLES' LIVES

But the most telling testimony of all must be the lives of those early Christians. We must ask ourselves: What caused them to go everywhere telling the message of the risen Christ?

Had there been any visible benefits accrued to them from their efforts—prestige, wealth, increased social status or material benefits—we might logically attempt to account for their actions, for their wholehearted and total allegiance to this "risen Christ."

As a reward for their efforts, however, those early Christians were beaten, stoned to death, thrown to the lions, tortured and crucified. Every conceivable method was used to stop them from talking.

Yet, they laid down their lives as the ultimate proof of their complete confidence in the truth of their message.

WHERE DO YOU STAND?

How do you evaluate this overwhelming historical evidence? What is your decision about the fact of Christ's empty tomb? What do *you* think of Christ?

When I was confronted with the overwhelming evidence for Christ's resurrection, I had to ask the logical question: "What difference does all this evidence make to me? What difference does it make whether or not I believe Christ rose again and died on the cross for my sins?" The answer is put best by something Jesus said to a man who doubted—Thomas. Jesus told him: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6).

On the basis of all the evidence for Christ's resurrection, and considering the fact that Jesus offers forgiveness of sin and an eternal relationship with God, who would be so foolhardy as to reject Him? Christ is alive! He is living today.

You can trust God right now by faith through prayer. Prayer is talking with God. God knows your heart and is not so concerned with your words as He is with the attitude of your heart. If you have never trusted Christ, you can do so right now.

The prayer I prayed is: "Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and trust You as my Savior. Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be. Thank You that I can trust You."

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